

REMARKS

Claims 12 and 14-20 remain in this application. Claim 12 has been amended to incorporate the features from claim 13, and claim 13 has been canceled. Applicant respectfully submits that this amendment should be entered since it merely incorporates allowable subject matter from original claim 13 into independent claim 12, and should not require any further consideration or search since amended claim 12 covers exactly the same novel combination of features originally presented in dependent claim 13.

The Final Office Action rejects claims 12-20 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as allegedly being unpatentable over LaFeuille in view of DeLemme. With regard to claim 13, the Office Action states that one having ordinary skill in the art would have optimized the application amount/location of moisture, through routine experimentation, in order to ensure complete and thorough humidification of the treated material. Applicant respectfully submits that neither LaFeuille nor DeLemme provide any disclosure or suggestion of any structure or method for applying different amounts of moisture to the material at different locations in the annular space. DeLemme discloses a common central duct for supplying the same amount of a fluid to central ports of all of the separate cells. LaFeuille discloses blowing hot gases into the cylinder 2 such that the gases pass evenly through a close-meshed metallic cloth covering the cylinder into the space between the outer drum and the cylinder.

Furthermore, in contrast to the motivation suggested by the Office Action of ensuring complete and thorough humidification of the treated material, the claimed step of

applying different amounts of moisture at different locations in the annular space, allows the applicant's claimed method to achieve unexpected results such as minimizing problems with degradation of the tobacco due to the rotation of the cylinders. These advantages are discussed in the specification at page 6, line 16 - page 7, line 8.

For at least the above reasons, Applicant submits that amended independent claim 12, and hence all remaining dependent claims 14-20, are novel and non-obvious over LaFeuille and DeLemme, whether considered individually or in combination. Withdrawal of the rejection under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) is therefore requested. Applicant respectfully requests that a timely Notice of Allowance be issued in this case.

Respectfully submitted,

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Date: January 21, 2004

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